

## **Formalized Knowledge Transfer and Mentoring: What, Why, How**

By

Dr. William A. Gray, President  
Corporate Mentoring Solutions Inc.  
Victoria, BC Canada

Does your company face a looming exodus of Boomers retiring? Is there concern that the organizational knowledge they took years to acquire will leave with them? Does your company need to attract new talent? reduce costly turnover? develop talent at all levels? prepare new managers and leaders?

If you answered “Yes” to any of these questions, you will find the rest of this article useful, because it is based on 29 years of experience developing over 150 different programs for a wide variety of companies, including these: Chevron, Shell, Exxon, Brooklyn Union Gas, Dow Chemical, Occidental Chemical, CSX Transportation, Kodak, Hewlett Packard, Sony Electronics, Sara Lee, Sears, Darden Restaurants, Boeing.

### **What is Knowledge Transfer and Mentoring?**

Knowledge can be formally transferred (intentionally, systematically, planned) within a Knowledge Transfer Program -- or informally shared (whenever, however, around the water cooler, on an elevator between floors). Mentoring can occur within a carefully planned and monitored Formalized Mentoring Program that has a known beginning and endpoint (usually 6-12 months) for carefully matched partners. More often, mentoring occurs informally when a mentor spontaneously chooses a protege (or mentee) and then provides various kinds of assistance over 2-7 years, according to over 200 books that describe this process. The following discussion focuses on the more formalized kinds of partnerships that produce intended outcomes. See Table 1.

**Formalized Knowledge Transfer Programs** are started for sound business reasons, such as systematically ensuring that Knowledge Providers intentionally pass on their professional, organizational or institutional knowledge to Knowledge Seekers before retiring. Typically, a coordinator of this group matches Providers with Seekers (who need that particular knowledge) and then regularly monitors Knowledge Transfer to ensure that it occurs to meet the business case. What is transferred is typically knowledge about something (e.g., answering a question, explaining how to work with a particular client), but it can include practical know-how. It is important to note that Knowledge Provider-Seeker partners do not have to be highly interpersonally compatible nor commit to a long-term relationship because they may interact only a few times, unlike mentor-protege partners.

**Table 1. Key Characteristics of Formalized Knowledge Transfer and Mentoring Programs**

<b>Key Characteristics</b>	<b>Knowledge Transfer Programs</b>	<b>Formalized Mentoring Programs</b>
<b>Why &amp; How it Starts</b>	Planned around sound business case so partner matching occurs on important Topics for discussion & Demographics.	Planned to meet sound business case for a targeted group and purpose (e.g., developing future leaders) and so partner matching occurs on core Competencies to be developed and monitored.
<b>Who Participates</b>	Knowledge Providers (KP) and Knowledge Seekers (KS).	Typically targeted groups (newer hires, future managers, future leaders).
<b>How Partner Matching Occurs</b>	Coordinator matches KP with KS to ensure particular sets of knowledge are transferred.	Coordinator matches best-fit Mentor-Protege partners on several criteria; e.g., Expertise/Needs, Compatibility needed for long-term relationship, Demographics.
<b>Duration</b>	From present until the large number of Boomers retire.	Typically 6-12 months to meet business need.
<b>Partner Bonding</b>	Not required (for short-term matches).	Occurs because of best-fit matching & commitment to work together.
<b>Training</b>	Not needed for KPs or KSs. Needed for Coordinators to oversee the Knowledge Transfer Program.	Partners trained to work together (lack of training is #1 reason for failure, according to an 8-nation study). Coordinators trained to oversee everything.
<b>Monitoring</b>	Coordinator monitors Action Plans to ensure KP-KS partners are meeting.	Coordinator oversees everything, including Mentoring Action Plans for achieving core Competencies.
<b>Main Challenge</b>	Getting large numbers to participate so organizational knowledge is transferred.	Time commitment required for planning, implementation, partners meetings, coordination.

Within a much more complex **Formalized Mentoring Program**, mentors intentionally fulfill as many as 20 functions over 6-24 months, such as: role modeling, coaching, teaching, gate opening, gate keeping, motivating, advising, being a sounding board for ideas and a confidant. Effective mentors equip less-experienced proteges (or mentees) with practical know-how, the tricks of the trade, the unwritten rules, and new competencies so proteges become part of the corporate family and are more productive workers. Effective mentors also empower proteges to utilize their diversity and uniqueness to fulfill their passions/dreams/goals and to be creative contributors, because this prevents organizations from stagnating. If only equipping occurs, this can produce an “organizational” man or woman. If only empowering occurs, this can cause chaos as individual proteges “do their own thing.”

### **Why start Formalized Knowledge Transfer and Mentoring Programs?**

When mentors equip and empower proteges, this reduces costly turnover, develops protege’s talents by developing core competencies, helps them navigate career path options, prepares them for advancement to new positions. Achieving any one of these goals will more than pay for a formalized mentoring program. For example, a 1999 Emerging Workforce Study found that in an organization of 1,000 employees, 350 employees (35%) will leave

annually when mentoring is not provided regularly compared to 160 employees (16%) when it is; if it costs \$50,000 to replace an employee, losing 350 will cost \$17.5 million annually to replace them versus \$8 million annually to replace 160 employees. This means that regularly-provided mentoring saves \$9.5 million annually in employee replacement costs in an organization of 1,000 employees.

A Knowledge Transfer Program ensures that important organizational and professional knowledge is intentionally transferred to those who need it, so they do not have to re-discover this for themselves, often via unproductive and time-consuming trial-and-error learning. What is most valuable to transfer is higher-level knowledge that cannot be readily learned from books, courses or internet searches, such as:

- Conceptual understandings about how things work (tricks of the trade).
- Wisdom and insights gained from many life/work experiences (lessons learned).
- Best practices and how they were achieved (resistance, how overcome, etc.).
- Key contacts within the organization (e.g., influencers) and outside (e.g., customer contacts).
- Intellectual property and inventions.

## **How to start Formalized Knowledge Transfer and Mentoring Programs?**

Many organizations allow Novices or Advanced Beginners (with no practical know-how) to start programs that will produce intended outcomes, but this result does not happen. Why not? Because they simply encourage informal knowledge sharing/mentoring or implement a poorly planned initiative -- instead of a formalized program that produces intended outcomes because of its formal structures, processes, expectations, training, coordination, monitoring, etc.

When deciding who to allow to plan and implement your program, you might want to use the 5-level model proposed by the Dreyfus brothers, who compared research in many fields to find out how one becomes an Expert (reference: Dreyfus, H. and Dreyfus, S. Expertise in real world contexts, *Organization Studies*, vol. 26, no. 5, pages 779-792, 2005). Table 2 describes how one becomes a **Mentoring Expert**, who can help you plan and implement different types of programs for different groups and business purposes.

**Table 2. The Dreyfus Model for Becoming an Expert in a Dedicated, Focused Field.**

Level	Main Characteristics of a Mentoring Expert
Expert	Has at least 10 dedicated years focusing on a field (e.g., developing distinctive mentoring programs that are appropriate for different situations/groups). Experience in field is broad and deep. Aware of important variables in any new situation. Able to use different paradigms and heuristics to solve problems quickly and creatively. Reflective practitioner who self-assesses what works and doesn't. Appropriately plans and implements in each new/different condition. Engages in "forward" reasoning to solve a problem. Typically, this person developed the rules that serve as Guiding Principles to prevent problems and enhance success.
Proficient	Has at least 5 years in field, with some varied experiences. Still "rule-bound" to other people's rules when solving problems. Becoming a reflective practitioner. Can plan and implement several different types of mentoring programs, and is starting to understand Guiding Principles.
Competent	Has repeated experience doing the same thing. (e.g., can implement <u>one type</u> of simple Mentoring program). Follows memorized "rules" -- but is unaware of Guiding Principles.
Advanced Beginner	Knows "about" mentoring for specific circumstances. Engages in backward reasoning to solve problems. Likely to implement simplistic "do-your-own-thing" mentoring <u>initiative</u> than a more formal program with structured components that produce desired outcomes. Doesn't feel responsible for outcomes.
Novice	Little or no direct experience. May have read books or articles, but has no practical understanding based on actual experience. Unaware of Guiding Principles.

The U.S. Dept. of Labor's *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* asserts that mentoring is the most complex type of human interaction, being more complex than teaching, counseling, supervising or coaching. Why? Because mentors fulfill so many functions within the mentoring relationship. If mentoring one person is so complex, even more complex is the planning and implementation of Formalized Mentoring Programs for a targeted group so that each protege and mentor benefits as well as the sponsoring organization so it will continue the program.

To produce such mutual benefits requires thoughtful initial planning followed by coordinated implementation of key tasks – and this requires a lot of time if the program is paper-based. See Table 3.

**Table 3. Time Required for Key Mentoring Coordinator Tasks using Paper- and Web-based Methods.**

Key Coordinator Tasks (reported by 34 coordinators of small paper-based mentoring programs enrolling 12-25 pairs or matched partners)	Time Required using Conventional Paper-Based Applications, Resumes, Surveys, Reports	Time needed when using CMST's web-based Mentoring Management System®
<b>Enrolling/registering</b> participants	1-2 people spent 3-5 hrs handling written applications, resumes	Participants spend 30-60 minutes online
<b>Matching</b> mentor-protege partners	3-6 people spent 10-13 hrs	1 Coord needs 1-3 hrs
<b>Monitoring</b> progress achieving goals	1-2 people spent 11-13 hrs	1 Coord needs 1-2 hr/month
<b>Evaluating</b> protege benefits	1-2 people spent 9-11 hrs	1 Coord needs 2-3 hrs
<b>Evaluating</b> mentor benefits	1-2 people spent 5-7 hrs	1 Coord needs 2-3 hrs

Table 3 shows that using a web-based system will reduce the time, labor and resulting costs required to implement systematic Knowledge Transfer and Formalized Mentoring Programs so that more individuals can

participate in these two beneficial processes. Table 4 describes how the web-based system works. Notice that it produces success in several key ways when used to facilitate mentoring:

1. Matches best-fit partners on needs/expertise on competencies to be developed.
2. Provides online training to develop a good mentoring relationship.
3. Ensures competency development using an online Mentoring Action Plan to schedule meetings and monitor progress and results.

**Table 4. CMSI's Web-based System (called Colaboro®)**

<b>Colaboro® - KT for Knowledge Transfer</b>	<b>Colaboro® - MCD for Mentoring Competency Development</b>
Users are Knowledge Providers (KPs) and Knowledge Seekers (KSs) on client-supplied Topics for discussion.	Users are Proteges and Mentors who are matched on corresponding Needs/Expertise on core competencies supplied by the client.
Benefits: Systematic Knowledge Transfer to those who need institutional or professional knowledge.	Benefits: Ensures that complex competencies are actually developed via mentoring. Increased productivity and retention.
Users log on to Colaboro and indicate their Demographics & preferred partner Demographics; check Topics you want to discuss as a KP or KS.	Users log on to Colaboro and indicate their Demographics; answer Mentoring Compatibility Indicator; rate their Needs or Expertise (gaps/strengths) on a list of core competencies.
Coordinator electronically matches best-fit KP-KS partners.	Coordinator electronically matches best-fit M-P partners using any or all of the matching tools above.
Partners may use online Action Plan to schedule meetings/discussions.	Partners use online Mentoring Action Plan to be prepared for meetings and to develop each competency over several weeks/months.
Users answer online Survey to report benefits gained.	Partners create online Mentoring Agreement to foster commitment & prevent problems.
	Partners answer the Mentoring Style Indicator to build good relationship; basis for Online Partner Training.
	Use Virtual Library.
	Users answer coordinator-prepared online Survey to report benefits.
<b>Coordinator</b> accesses/uses Coordinator Tools corresponding to all User Tools, plus Reports.	<b>Coordinator</b> accesses/uses Coordinator Tools corresponding to all User Tools, plus Reports.

**In closing, here's a suggestion:** Because Formalized Mentoring requires much more time and partner commitment, implement Knowledge Transfer as a way to quickly connect a larger number of people. As they progress from being strangers and get to know one another, their relationship might then develop into a mentoring partnership over a longer time period -- to work on even more challenging goals, such as developing core competencies the protege needs in order to advance and the organization needs to become more competitive.

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 Contact: Dr. William A. Gray: **1-877-955-0314** in Victoria, BC Canada; Email: [wgray@mentoring-solutions.com](mailto:wgray@mentoring-solutions.com)  
 Website: [www.mentoring-solutions.com](http://www.mentoring-solutions.com)